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AUTHOR Bump, Jerome
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ABSTRACT

In teaching, instruction can focus on literary works as storehouses of emotion that can serve as models of how to communicate emotions to the self and others. To help students identify and articulate what they feel as they read Victorian novels, one instructor asked students to record their emotions in a journal divided with quotes on one side of the page and reactions on the other. His first goal was to identify a range of feelings, but he asked for other responses as well: self-esteem issues in the text and in the reader; personal associations, especially family memories; awareness of family dynamics in the text; and functional and dysfunctional interactions as defined by family systems theory (the primary approach in alcoholism treatment). The students coded their journals for each of the features, counted the number of entries in each category when the novel was completed and charted their progress. As a result of this emotional approach to literature, the instructor was awarded a second teaching fellowship and was asked by the campus counseling center to make presentations on literature as therapy in its outreach programs. Meanwhile, his courses in literature continued to evolve--in a course description from 1990, emotional literacy is set in the context of brain hemisphericity research, and family systems theory is delineated more explicitly. (TB)

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Jerome Bump
Dept. Of English
Univ. Of Texas
Austin, Tx. 78712-1164
bump@mail.utexas.edu

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TEACHING EMOTIONAL LITERACY

When I was a child I had a vocabulary for expressing emotion, though it was limited to the usual "mad, bad, sad, or glad." It seemed that the more education I received the more thorough was my lobotomy, cutting the left side of my brain off from the right, splitting reason from emotion, language from feeling, my head from my heart. Nine years of college and fifteen years of ostensibly objective "research" in an institution that the student newspaper once labeled "the church of reason" had anesthetized me and endowed me with an amazing ability to spin complex webs of words to defend myself from emotion. However, as the result of family therapy, I became aware of how crucial and yet how difficult it was to know what I am feeling and be able to express it. As I came out of my anesthesia, I also became more aware of the irony that students were originally attracted to literature because of its emotional impact but subjected to professors, like me, who did everything they could to avoid that subject.

However, I discovered in Alice Brand's *Therapy in Writing* that the need for emotional literacy was recognized and addressed in colleges of education in the 50's. At that time Redl and Wattenberg in *Mental Health in Teaching* stated "'that the teacher can and must assume some share of responsibility for the emotional as well as the intellectual development of his students is today a truism'" (36). But that responsibility was shirked in most college English departments, especially at research universities. Brand points out that "at the joint frontier of psychology and education in the 1960's, a movement that assigned to the emotional factor in education a role as important as -- or perhaps, more important than -- traditional academics emerged with profound implications for teachers. The idea of affective education, otherwise called 'psychological' or 'confluent' education, mobilized teacher interest in the realm of emotion and feelings" (*Therapy* 39-40). But not in most university English departments. Gerald Weinstein's *Toward Humanistic Education: A Curriculum of Affect* focused on the needs of "poor, minority-group children" but was ignored by most college English departments. Clark Moustakas' *The Authentic Teacher: Sensitivity and Awareness in the Classroom* discussed "emotions in the classroom" and related issues but was virtually unknown in English departments.

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Emotional literacy is even more essential as we move into the twenty-first century. In the local paper I read that

> While the lagging test scores of American schoolchildren in mathematics and reading have troubled educators, a new kind of deficit, in many ways equally alarming, is becoming all too apparent: emotional illiteracy. America's children seem desperately in need of lessons in how to handle their emotions, how to settle disagreements, in caring and just plain getting along. The signs of this deficiency can be read in statistics showing sharp rises in the numbers of teen-age suicides, homicides, and pregnancies in the past decade. Partly in response, a handful of pioneering educators have begun to design and teach courses in what some call 'emotional literacy'.... The educators see these courses as an antidote, the kind of instruction that might have led to a different outcome in the recent shooting deaths of two students at a Brooklyn high school, had those involved had its benefit. 'To commit that kind of violence you have to have reached a kind of emotional deadness or desperation, ' said Shelly Kessler, a leader of the new movement who directs a program in emotional education at the Crossroads School in Santa Monica, Calif. 'This kind of education is the preventive measure'....where the courses have been tried, educators say, there has been an appreciable improvement in the tenor of school life. In a survey of 200 Brooklyn teachers and administrators who had used the program with their students, 71 percent said it had led to less physical violence in the classroom and two thirds said there was less name-calling and fewer put-downs among students. 78 % said their students seemed more caring toward each other, 72 percent thought their students were better able to understand other people's points of view and 69 percent said the students seemed more cooperative. The teachers also reported positive effects in themselves, particularly in their ability to deal with angry students and to help them deal with conflicts, in their sensitivity to students; problems and their ability to listen. (Goleman).

Nor is the latest incarnation of this movement confined to high schools. In 1994, Jeffrey Berman, in his pioneering *Diaries to an English Professor*, concluded that though "few literary critics, apart from feminists, reader-response critics, and composition theorists, have recognized the affective components of knowledge ...effective teaching is ... affective teaching .... Classroom discussions of literature awaken intense emotions within teachers and students alike -- love, hate, passion, jealousy, fear -- and these emotions cannot be relegated to 'guidance counseling'" (226).

Finally some college English teachers are trying to include both sides of the brain, as evidenced by the first entry in your program, workshop #1, "Beyond the Cognitive Domain: Classroom Practices in The Teaching and Learning of Writing" sponsored by the Assembly on Expanded Perspectives on Learning of the NCTE. Those interested in teaching emotional literacy are a minority even in this association but hopefully our numbers will grow as more teachers became aware of David Bleich's *Readers and Feelings* and Alice Brand's pioneering books, *Therapy in Writing* and *The Psychology of Writing: The Affective Experience* (an area curiously neglected by cognitive psychologists of writing), and new kinds of freshman English "textbooks" such as *Pain and Possibility*, *Writing the Natural Way*, *Writing on the Right Side of the Brain*, *Wild Mind*, *Writings from the Inner Self*, and *Writing for Your Life*.

As a new convert to that movement, I had many questions. If an English teacher is interested in teaching emotional literacy how is he or she go about it? How to make students aware of their feelings? How to give them a vocabulary for naming them? Should I focus on literary examples to demonstrate the use of detail, narrative, and metaphor to convey feeling to a reader or listener? What kind of expressive writing should I require? No doubt it should be personal, but should it be reading journals, diaries, personal essays, family vignettes, diaries, full-length autobiographies, Should students be encouraged to add photographs of self, family, and friends and all kinds of related materials? How can such highly personal writing be "corrected" and graded without seeming to correct and grade the person who wrote it? What preparation should the teacher have? To what extent should the teacher make his or her own autobiographical writing available? To what extent if any should students be encouraged to write about dramatic, traumatic, or difficult personal experiences and/or tell difficult truths or half-truths about themselves? If they do, how should the teacher and other students respond? Should the teacher model such self-revelation? What relationship if any should be established with the campus counseling center?

Although I was not aware of this movement at the time, expression and denial of feelings became one of the themes of my courses especially in the context of family and gender interactions. In my honors freshman Composition and Reading in World Literature course (E603), for 1987-8, for example, I focused on developing "writing skills to communicate our emotions as well as our thoughts to others and to ourselves." In the description for the 1990-1991 course I stated that

> The primary goal of the course will be to identify and articulate our emotions, especially those which drive our habits, in our responses to family dynamics, including sex roles, as represented in literature. We will try to develop a sense of literary works as potential calisthenics of

> emotions which we can enjoy and profit from for the rest of our lives.... Students will keep journals of their emotional and other responses to the works we read and at times bring these to class to help initiate discussion.

Partly as a result of this change in my teaching, I was selected by the administration for a Teaching Fellowship and by students as a Mortor Board Preferred Professor.

I began to focus on literary works as storehouses of emotion that could serve as models of how to communicate emotions to self and others. I changed the texts in my Victorian novels course (Bump "Innovative" 357). To help students identify and articulate what they felt as they read the novels, I asked them to record their emotions in a journal divided with quotes on one side of the page and reactions on the other. Our first goal was to identify a range of feelings, but I asked for other responses to be recorded as well: self-esteem issues in the text and in themselves; personal associations, especially family memories; awareness of family dynamics in the text and of functional and dysfunctional interactions as defined by family systems theory (the primary approach in alcoholism treatment); and the characters' emotions and their ability to express them. The students coded their journals for each of the features, counted the number of entries in each category when a novel was completed, ;and charted their progress.

While the family systems theory entries called for cognitive responses, I gave the following journal instructions for emotional literacy :

> I will be looking, first of all, for your awareness of and ability to articulate your emotional reactions to the book. This is not to be confused with your awareness of emotions in the characters in the book, and is not quite the same as speculation about how you would feel if you were one of the characters.... Use the following format: 'I felt' followed by an emotion, like those listed in the "Vocabulary of Feelings" which follows [in the xeroxed anthology]. Focus on how you felt when you read the passage or feel now rereading it, not what you think about it. "I felt that ..." or "I felt like" can lead you away from feelings and into thoughts. Try to get into deep emotions, such as fear, sadness, and love, rather than merely intellectual surprise, confusion, amusement, curiosity, etc. Be as specific as possible. It is good to note, "I felt moved," or "I felt touched," but better to specify exactly ... what emotion was touched or moved within you. Try to give some sense of why" you have these reactions (some personal relevance) at least once in a while.

The students in one of my E603 courses suggested substituting words and characters while reading. For example, while reading Medea's speech to Jason, one student saw the possibility of working

> out some of my own anger. Reading along, I substituted some of my own words so that I could say, 'How dare you abandon me!' to my father, or 'How dare you beat my mother and steal my childhood!' to my stepfather, or 'How dare you use me and treat me like an object!' to various boyfriends. Through Medea I was able to confront people I may never see again; she let me vent my anger through her. When I read *Medea* I felt anger that I have suppressed for years come up and make itself known; even if it is not dissolved, at least I am more aware of its presence and its impact on my life.

As a result of my teaching along these I was awarded another Teaching Fellowship; was asked by the campus Counseling Center to make presentations on literature as therapy in its outreach programs; and was invited by the campus Center for Teaching Effectiveness to speak on "Teaching and Psychotherapy" at their annual Conference for Experienced Faculty and on "Exploring Alternative Teaching Methods: Left Brain, Right Brain" at their New Faculty Teaching Orientation.

The course continued to evolve. When I wrote the description for my Victorian novel class for the summer of 1990 I set emotional literacy in the context of brain hemisphericity research and was more explicit about family systems theory:

> Unless one is familiar with psychological, reader-centered literary theory and criticism, this course will probably be very different from any English course you have had in the past. For most students all or almost all of the forty or more courses taken in college focus on the left brain rather than the right, on thought rather than emotion, the mind rather than the heart. This is one attempt to redress the imbalance.... We will focus on learning to feel, identify, and articulate our emotions ..... We will also explore the interface between Victorian fiction and family systems theory, which developed as a way to explain and assist families with individuals suffering from chemical dependence or psychosomatic illness such as anorexia nervosa, though today therapists know that many other compulsions contribute to dysfunction in families. Designed for students interested in self-exploration, this course may be especially valuable for students who have experience with or interest in counseling, psychotherapy, experiential learning, or twelve-step groups.... In addition, students may be given surveys and self-report psychological measures

at the beginning and end of the course to measure shifts in expressiveness, individuation, relationship skills, etc....

To the Victorian novels I added Bradshaw's *The Family* and a collection of xeroxes that included Group Participation Guidelines [2 pp.], a Vocabulary of Feelings [4 pp.], videotape Information about the Bradshaw and related series, Counseling Center Information, and selections from F. Walsh, *Major Models of Family Therapy*; the Myers-Briggs Scale Information from *Please Understand Me*; Jerry M. Lewis, *Optimal Families; Competent But Pained Families;* Anthony Wohl, *The Victorian Family;* Patricia Parker, "Charlotte and Branwell Bronte: a Family Systems Approach"; Maria McCormick, "First Representations of the Gamma Alcoholic in the English Novel"; Ghinger and Grant, "Alcohol and the Family in Literature"; Paula Cohen, "The Heroine as Anorectic: Scapegoating and Guilt in the Nineteenth-Century Domestic Novel"; Christy Moore, "Mate selection in *Jane Eyre*"; Michael E. Kerr, "Chronic Anxiety and Defining a Self"; Gloria Steinem, "Looking for a Family of Equals"; and my list of contemporary novels with similar themes.

It was primarily on the basis of this course that I received one of the most prestigious teaching awards on campus, the Holloway Award, the only major award chosen by students rather than administrators. More importantly, I knew from my own experiences that students were being affected. For example, at one point I had Ms. Cindy Carlson, a professional counselor and professor of family systems theory at the university, answer questions at a session of the Victorian novel course. After the class a student handed her a note revealing that she had tried to kill herself. As there was no name on it, Cindy passed the note on to me. At the time I was grading student journals and was able to match the handwriting. I contacted the campus counseling center and they kindly provided me with a packet of information on how to deal with such situations. Following their advice I put some of their information and a note from me in her journal. My heart dropped when she did not appear at the following class meeting. However, she did come to the next one and spent the whole time during class reading the material I had put in her journal. After class she came up to me and thanked me, saying that she had not been able to talk about this with anyone at the university. I took her immediately to the counseling center where she made an appointment.

I recalled my own daughters' struggles with depression and suicide and wondered how many students had been sitting in my classes throughout the years with similar problems, and how many like that there were at that moment attending classes throughout the university. I felt like my eyes had been opened and that I had made a breakthrough in my teaching and in my capacity for being fully human.

I recalled what Leo Buscaglia, a professor of education at U.S.C., had written:

> In the winter of 1969, an intelligent, sensitive female student of mine committed suicide. She was from a seemingly fine upper middle class family. Her grades were excellent. She was popular and sought after.... I have never been able to forget her eyes; alert, alive, responsive, full of promise. I can even recall her papers and examinations which I always read with interest....I often wonder what I would read in her eyes or her papers if I could see them now.... I was not blaming myself for her death. I simply wondered what I might have done; if I could have, even momentarily, helped. (9-10).

Eventually I shifted the student journal more and more in the direction of autobiography. Although I did not know it at the time, again I was participating in a movement: "Inspired to some extent by the ideas advanced by Rogers, psychologists Arthur Jersild and Clark Moustakas elevated the study of self above any subject matter or external skill that could be studied in school' (Brand, *Therapy* XX). I was also contributing to a long-standing tradition in the teaching of writing. I remembered that the best course I had ever taken in college, freshman English at Amherst College, was devoted solely to self-exploration -- there were no books at all. Twenty years later, when forty-eight nationally famous writing teachers were asked to contribute an example of the best student writing and an explanation of its excellence "at least thirty of the examples in the collection are personal experience essays -- twenty of them autobiographical narratives -- and several of the remaining eighteen include writing about the writer" (Coles; Faigley 120). In my courses, journals, brief writing exercises, and computer-assisted writing began to culminate in essay-length writing and finally in embryonic autobiographies.

I also began to address the problem of the few uninterested and unprepared students who showed up in my courses because they did not bother to read the course description. As there was a much higher probability that students in the honors program would chooses courses on the basis of their descriptions rather than just the times they were offered, I added some caveats. For example, in the description for 1992-1993 I stated:

> This section of E603 focuses on autobiography and is designed especially for students who have experienced trauma, addiction, or family dysfunction. The kind of writing taught will be what is known as personal, exploratory, expressive, or therapeutic writing. The chief approach will be reader-centered criticism as in David Bleich's *Readers and Feelings*.... In addition to literature, we will use two self-help books. Bradshaw's *Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child* each semester and his *The Family* primarily during the second semester. A prospective student is advised to read the

> caveat on p. 64 of *Homecoming*, and see if he or she scores more than ten on his "quiz" on p. 29..... CAVEATS: This class is not for you if you can not adhere to the attendance policy outlined above, if you are unwilling to identify and articulate your emotions, or if you dislike self-help books and/or exploring subpersonalities such as your "inner child," a lot of literature about childhood written by women, or computers."

I added to the xeroxed anthology selections from *Writing the Natural Way:; Using Right-Brain Techniques To Release Your Expressive Powers*; "Support Urged for Gay Teens"; *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain; Using the Right Brain in the Language Arts; Wild Mind;* "Where Emotions Come From" and our counseling center pamphlets on perfectionism and depression.

By the fall of 1994 one version of the course I developed in response to these questions was called "Personal, Expressive Writing" and the emphasis shifted to autobiographical "stories": "computer-assisted writing and research culminating in letters, interviews, vignettes, scenes, dialogue, and/or personal myths which become the bases for stories about ourselves and our families. The primary text was *Turning Memories into Memoirs: A Handbook for Writing Lifestories*, by Denis Ledoux, and John Bradshaw's *Homecoming* was recommended but not required. Other assignments included lifelines and genograms.

In the essays students are graded on their writing generally and how well they express emotion in particular. In order to avoid even the suggestion that they are being graded on their personalities rather than their writing, their autobiographies are graded solely on how much work they put into them and whether or not they meet basic formal requirements However, after reading Jeffrey Berman's recent *Diaries to an English Professor* I am now wondering if much of this grading can't be avoided. I would appreciate any suggestions about this or any of the related issues emphasis on emotion generates,